

# TMDLs: How They Apply

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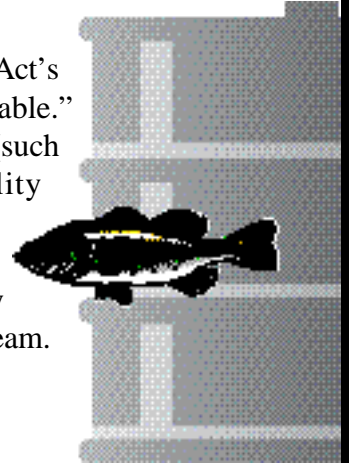
## *What Are They?*

A total maximum daily load (TMDL) is the maximum amount of a specific pollutant that can be assimilated by a stream without causing impairment or violating water quality standards. The allowable amount of a specific pollutant takes into account all sources of that pollutant in a watershed, including point sources and non-point sources and requires a portion to be set aside as a margin of safety.

Point sources include discharges from sewage treatment plants and industrial facilities. Non-point sources include all other sources of the pollutant, including run-off from the land and deposition from the air.

The water quality standards are based on the Clean Water Act's minimum goals that all waters be "fishable" and "swimmable." To this end, the act requires states to assign a designated use (such as recreation or fishing) and corresponding water quality standards for each water body within its jurisdiction.

A TMDL is for only one pollutant. If a stream is impaired by two pollutants, two TMDLs must be developed for that stream.



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## *What laws and regulations require TMDLs?*

The implementing regulations of the federal Clean Water Act and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) require:



States to develop lists of impaired waters for which current pollution controls are not stringent enough to meet water quality standards. The list—known as a 303(d) list—is used to determine which streams need TMDLs;



States to establish priority rankings for waters on the lists based on severity of pollution and the designated use of the water body; states must also identify those waters for which TMDLs will be developed over the next two years;



States to submit the list of waters to EPA every two years (April 1 of the even numbered years);

## *Allocating Pollutants:*

TMDLs specify a pollutant budget that must be achieved to meet state water quality standards.



States to develop TMDLs. TMDLs specify a pollutant budget that must be achieved to meet state water quality standards and allocate pollutant loads among pollution sources in a watershed, e.g., point and non-point sources; and



EPA to approve or disapprove state lists and TMDLs within 30 days of final submission.

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### ***What are the basic steps for determining TMDLs?***

**A**lthough all watersheds must be handled on a case-by-case basis when developing TMDLs, there are basic processes or steps that apply. They are:

1. Data collection (pollutant loads, sources, etc.) for impaired water bodies listed on a state's 303(d) list;
2. Data analysis;
3. TMDL development for impaired water bodies;
4. Public review and comments; and
5. EPA approval of the TMDL.



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### ***Do TMDLs specify how pollutant loads are to be reduced within a watershed?***

**N**o. The TMDL method only determines the total amount of a specific pollutant that a watershed can assimilate without causing impairment or violate water quality standards. TMDLs do not specify by what means particular pollutant loads are to be reduced. Rather, TMDLs allocate the maximum contribution a source category (e.g., urban stormwater, industrial, agricultural, etc.) can contribute to the sum total load. The point source and non-point source allocations are implemented by the states through existing or expanded regulations and programs.

#### ***Federal Objectives:***

Water quality standards are based on the Clean Water Act's minimum goals that all waters be "fishable" and "swimmable."